

FEBRUARY 22, 2025 FATHER HENK VAN MEIJEL

We can look at this feast of St. Peter in two different ways. And if you look at it in a rational way, or a historical way, it does absolutely not make sense. The current chair, which is a throne, which was donated by Emperor Charles the Bald in 875, so it's pretty old, and given to Pope John VIII. And it's a throne. Actually, two people could sit on it, and it's covered in bronze by Bernini in the 17th century. And it's beautiful, you can see it at St. Peter's Basilica. But before that, there were two chairs of St. Peter. And so, which chair he was sitting on? And if you ask me, I wonder if St. Peter had a chair to sit on in the first place. As we know, he was sent to Rome, he ended up in Rome. And yes, he is the first Pope, and so it makes sense to have that chair. But from a historical perspective, and a rational perspective, it does not make sense. I'm sure Peter might be sitting on the bench somewhere or a rock, but he definitely was not sitting on a throne.

But on the other hand, it's the spiritual power. And we have, of course, it was given in a time where there's imperial power. Popes would go out to battle and so on. But it's that spiritual power, the spiritual throne. And it's very good to pray with that. In the first reading of the first letter of Peter, he does an exhortation to the elders, to basically the Bishops and the Priests, to be people of prayer. Not people to lord it over us. And thrones, of course, they're just like, "I'm sitting on a throne and I'm telling you people." And this is really the opposite message of, of course, Jesus gave us. Jesus did not say, "Lord it over one another" but "be good to one another." And St. Peter, in his first letter, is emphasizing that. To be generous people, to be honest people, first of all, and to be aware of it. I call it also this (unclear) effect. If I'm not honest and transparent people around me won't say much. But they're thinking, they're thinking,

and they will say, "Nice guy, he's preaching there and his words mean nothing." So it's so important to be transparent and to live clean lives.

And especially for Priests and religious to be examples for others. And, of course, we only have to look back in Church history that it has not always been that way. And even today, of course, Priests and religious are people and sometimes they get in trouble, and we still, of course, have some scandals once in a while. But our call is to be open, to be beyond suspect even. And this is one of the things, at least I remember from my Ordination, that we are called to live beyond suspect. That people cannot go around and say, "You know what? I saw Father Hank doing this or that." To be transparent.

And, of course, Pope Francis would of course say the same thing, and he has exalted priests also during his Pontificate to be people for others. It's in Jesuit slogan, but to be people for others. It's not all about the Priest or to power over others. And so, it is so important to pray with that. It's a beautiful symbol of the church. How the church also grew. And also how the church went through its phases of power and becoming equal for people. And, of course, today in the last few Popes they are people for others. And we have to try to emulate that.

Emulate that in our own lives, this is not just for Priests and for Bishops and so on. This is also for the laity, our viewers. Most of us who view this are parents, are grandparents. Our children will be watching us, too. Just like people are watching the Priest in a Parish, how he's living. Is he living a clean life or is he living a double life? And this is also, like I said, for our parents and grandparents to live honest, clean, transparent lives. Our children, our grandchildren see it, and that's the only way the church can grow because if there's scandal or if things don't add up we only send people away from the church. And children and grandchildren

will say, "Why would I want to go to the church "when you are acting like this?" They would not probably literally say to the parents but that's what they're thinking. And so, it's good stuff for us to pray with. And also to look at our own conduct, if there's something what should be changed. And often it might be that we might have to live more transparent lives. Amen.